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ABSTRACT

Intended to aid vocational education teachers in recognizing and dealing with sex biases contained in classroom materials, guidelines are offered to help the teacher deal with sexist language, roles, portrayal of personal traits, and illustrations. It is suggested, for example, that teachers point out sex-biased statements and discuss with students the perceptions they evoke or discourage. Guidelines for dealing with sex biased language deal with masculine generic forms and pronouns, gender nouns that denote occupations, inconsistencies, disparaging words (e.g., "the cute secretary"), and avoidance of reference to gender. Suggestions for dealing with roles address the topics of stereotypical occupational roles, inconsistencies in presenting occupational roles, leadership roles, tokenism, and social roles. Biased portrayal of physical attributes and personal traits are discussed as are omissions, subordinate roles, tokenism, and physical portrayals in illustrations. (MEK)

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Guidelines for the Creative Use of Biased Materials in a Non-Biased Way

WOMEN
ON WORDS
AND IMAGES

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TITLE PAGE

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GUIDELINES FOR THE CREATIVE USE OF BIASED MATERIALS IN A NON-BIASED WAY

A large percentage of the vocational education materials currently in use in schools and other institutions are sex-biased. That is, occupations and social roles have been defined and portrayed on the basis of sex. This bias considerably limits the scope of occupations presented to females and, to some extent, those presented to males.

Based on current and projected labor statistics and demographics, the traditional roles and occupations these materials present to women do not prepare them realistically for careers that will enable them to become self-sufficient adults, something our changing society is requiring from increasing numbers of women. And, by limiting roles and occupations on the basis of sex, many males are prevented from realizing their fullest potential. There are many undesirable ramifications of this situation for the individual and for society.

For economic reasons, and in some instances because of unavailability of non-biased materials, schools and other institutions will continue to use biased materials. The following guidelines are intended to aid vocational education teachers in recognizing and dealing with sex biases contained in these materials in such a way as to mitigate their effects. They will help prepare students more realistically for the future and aid more students in realizing their career potentials. The guidelines may also be used to help students explore their own biases, which are the result of their culture.

The guidelines were developed by Women on Words and Images from an analysis of vocational education materials conducted under a contract granted by the U.S. Office of Education, Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education. In addition to producing guidelines for the use of biased materials in a non-biased way, the purpose of this contract also was to create guidelines and a check list for sex-fair vocational education materials to be used by the publishers of these materials. The categories presented here: language, roles, personal traits, physical attributes, and illustrations which are contained in the examples used to illustrate them, were taken from the materials examined.

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH LANGUAGE

• Masculine generic forms

Point out the use of masculine generic terms; for example, mankind instead of humanity, manpower instead of human energy; manmade when referring to artificial or synthetic. Discuss this aspect of language with the students. Use the following questions to stimulate discussion:

Do the female members of the class feel a part of the generic class labeled mankind?

Why should generic male terms be used to indicate both males and females? If it is really meant to be inclusive, why not use a gender-free term such as humankind?

• Masculine pronouns

Point out the use of masculine pronouns he, his, him where he or she, her or his, or him or her should be used. Raise the same questions as suggested above.

• Gender nouns that denote occupations

Point out the use of masculine gender nouns that denote occupations; for example, businessman, middleman, fireman, policeman, salesman, foreman. Discuss these terms using questions similar to those above:

Do female students feel excluded from occupational categories labeled businessman, salesman, foreman?

Shouldn't we use common gender nouns such as firefighter, salesperson, or businessperson, which are non-biased and do not exclude people on the basis of sex?

• Inconsistencies

Point out inconsistencies in language in the materials. This may be the result of good intentions, but reflects a lack of awareness, or in some cases, tokenism. For example, a text may begin with the statement, "Both men and women can be electricians," and then continue to refer to "the electrician . . . he." Other examples are the occasional use of she/he, but more frequently he is used; or the use of he/she with masculine occupational nouns such as policeman, fireman, etc.

• Disparaging words

Point out disparaging words such as "cute secretary," "the girls in the front office," "the attractive nurse." Raise the following questions:

Are adjectives such as cute, attractive, or beautiful, appropriate for the occupations?

What are the students' reactions to the use of girl instead of woman?

What are the students' reactions to the use of boy in place of man? What does the phrase "the boys in the office" connote? Contrast these reactions to "the men in the office."

Are the reactions to girl and woman different from boy and man? Do they have different connotations?

Who might use the phrase "the girls in the office" or "the boys in the office?" Does who is using the phrase make a difference?

Should this kind of language be used in vocational education materials? Why?

- **Avoidance of reference to gender**

Point out instances where any reference to gender has been avoided in relation to occupations and roles; for example, "the electrician will . . .", "the plumber does . . ." While this avoids stereotypical language it is ineffective in increasing the career options presented for males and females and leaves us with the old mental images. Pointing out that gender-free terms include both males and females will help break down these stereotyped images.

Discuss the cumulative effect of biased language:

What effect does the constant use of sex-biased language have on students?

How does it help shape their self-concept?

Are males and females conditioned to think differently about themselves as a result of the cumulative effect of sex-biased language in these materials as well as elsewhere?

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH ROLES

- **Stereotypical occupational roles**

Call attention to stereotypical occupational roles. For example, are only males addressed when the materials discuss plumbers, machinists, welders, electricians, bricklayers, etc.? Are only females addressed when the materials discuss nurses, secretaries, beauticians? Discuss these occupational roles with the students. Use the following questions to stimulate the discussion:

Is there anything required, physically or mentally, by the occupation which could not be done effectively by either sex?

Are there currently members of both sexes in this occupation? For example, there are female telephone lineworkers, welders, plumbers, etc. Why aren't these shown in all materials dealing with these occupations?

How do the students feel about male nurses, female doctors, male secretaries, female welders, etc.? Point out that the biases they may have to these non-traditional occupational roles reflect cultural stereotypes about the sexes.

Are men seen as less masculine and women as less feminine if they choose non-traditional roles? What is masculinity? What is femininity? What does sexuality have to do with occupational roles?

- **Inconsistencies in presenting occupational roles**

Point out and discuss any inconsistencies in the presentation of occupational roles. For example, are both male and female assembly line workers shown and only male plant supervisors? Are male secretaries shown but not female executives?

- **Leadership roles**

Are only males shown in leadership roles? For example, are the presidents, vice presidents, and owners of businesses always male? Are police captains, shop supervisors, and office managers always male? The following questions can be used to facilitate a discussion:

Could women, with equal training and experience, do the job just as effectively?

Do the materials being used reflect what exists in society? If they do, should this situation continue to exist? Why? Are individuals or society losing anything from this?

- **Tokenism**

Point out any tokenism in the material being used. Does the material only occasionally present a non-traditional occupation for either males or females? For example, does a text on the building trades present just a few occupational roles for women? Does a text dealing with the paramedical profession present only a few roles for men? Or does the material present men and women in all roles working earnestly and equally side by side?

- **Social roles**

Are vocational choices tied to social roles? Are only women told to choose occupations that will allow them time off, and flexible schedules to accommodate raising a family? The option to do this should be presented to both sexes as a matter of choice, not prescription. Are secondary roles attributed to wives? For example, "the shopowner's wife can keep the books and do the secretarial chores." Are females portrayed as possessions and dependents? For example, "after the children have grown many husbands allow their wives to go back to

work," or "most married women do not need full-time jobs." Are only two-parent nuclear families shown, with father as wage earner and mother as homemaker? The area of social roles is probably the most difficult one to deal with. Most students have spent their lives in a stereotypical environment and have read many biased textbooks. Many of them do not have the confidence or inner resources to explore options on their own. The following questions explore stereotypical social roles in some biased materials, and will help students deal with their own cultural biases:

Given the fact that 90% of the women in the U.S. work for some portion of their lives, and the number of women in the labor force is increasing every year, shouldn't women prepare for careers in which they will find satisfaction and not ones that only allow them a flexible schedule?

Shouldn't men also be given the option of having more time to spend raising their children?

Should the total or major responsibility for the financial support of the family always be placed on the father?

Should women have to choose between having a career or being mothers? Does our society ask this of men? Why? Why does it seem that women know more about raising children than men? Could men develop this ability also? Would knowing this destroy their masculinity?

If a woman chooses both to have a family and a career, is she less likely to be a good mother? Is it possible for her to do both well? What ingredients are necessary for her to be able to do both well?

If a man chooses a less time-consuming job, or chooses to be the parent who takes time out of a career to be at home with the children, is he less masculine?

Should women prepare themselves to be financially independent? What is the best way to do this?

Should a husband have the right to allow or not allow his wife to return to work if she has taken time out of her career to be at home? Why?

Should the job of homemaker be relegated by one spouse to another, or should the needs of both people be taken into account?

What happens to a person when potential, ambition, and desire for a vocation are thwarted?

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH THE PORTRAYAL OF PERSONAL TRAITS

• Personal traits

Point out instances where personal traits are sex-linked. For example, are the traits of independence, decisiveness, persistence, inventiveness, or creativity, expected more often of men than women? Are men portrayed as having these characteristics more often than women? Are women shown as being more vain and emotional, and less assertive and competent than men? Point out that the capacities for these qualities exist in both males and females, and that there is a need to develop positive traits in both sexes. Make a list of positive job-related traits.

Ask the following questions:

Do the students see some of these as desirable only for males or only for females? Why?

Have males and females been socialized differently?

Should these traits be encouraged in all human beings?

• Physical attributes

Is unnecessary reference made to physical attributes, such as, the "attractive" secretary or the "good looking" vice president? If the attributes are not job-related, there is no need to mention them. Students should be made aware of these when they are sexist.

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH SEX-BIASED ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations in vocational education materials reinforce the images presented in the text. Teachers should be aware of biases, some of them subtle but potent, that exist in many illustrations. These should be pointed out to students. They can be a concrete base from which to discuss the biases in the materials. The following are particular areas of concern.

• Omissions

Have either males or females been omitted from traditionally sex-stereotyped occupations? For example, the text may state that nursing is an occupation both men and women should consider as a career, but show only women in the graphics. Or a text dealing with the building trades may state that women can be electricians, plumbers, welders, etc., but show only males in these roles in the graphics. The people in these illustrations are usually shown performing the duties of a particular occupation. This is a good place to ask:

Why couldn't members of either sex do that job?

What is required physically of the person doing the job?

Since males and females come in different sizes and shapes and have varying amounts of physical strength and energy, isn't it possible there would be both males and females capable of performing jobs that require physical strength?

Do students feel that males don't have the capacities to perform traditionally female occupations, and females don't possess the ability to perform traditionally male occupations; or is it because society has said that these are unattractive or unacceptable occupational roles for males or females?

Do the students think a woman welder or electrician is less feminine than a woman salesperson or beautician? Why? You may again wish to discuss the meaning of femininity.

Do the students think a male nurse, hairdresser, or elementary school teacher is less masculine than a male truck driver? Why? You may want to have the students define masculinity again.

Should occupations be determined on the basis of sexuality or on the basis of ability, interest and desire?

- **Subordinate roles**

Are women only shown in secondary roles in the materials? For example, are executives always male and secretaries always female; is the store owner always male and the sales help female; is the job supervisor always male, etc.? Should the reverse situations be shown? Why?

- **Tokenism**

Are women and men only occasionally illustrated in non-traditional occupations? For example, one black female doctor in an illustration of a group of doctors, or one male telephone operator in a whole line of female operators. This illustrates compliance or an attempt but is not a wholehearted effort to eliminate sex bias.

- **Physical portrayal**

Are females illustrated as curvaceous, beauty queen types, and males as tall, handsome, and perfectly proportioned, instead of an array of sizes, shapes, and physical attributes that depict the population realistically?

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ELIMINATING SEX BIASES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

- Invite people employed in non-traditional occupations to speak to students.
- Use audio-visual and other supplementary materials that are non-biased.
- Avoid new purchases of biased materials. Some publishing companies have attempted to eliminate sex biases from materials, and some materials are more bias-free than others.
- As a teacher, be aware of the myths and realities that surround the issue and point these out to students.
- Present students with an actual picture of the work world and prepare them realistically for the changes that are occurring. Some techniques that can be employed to prepare students for these changes are:

Discussion of the sex biases that exist in the culture, including their sources and how they are perpetuated.

Use of case studies dealing with the problem.

Use of role playing to get students involved at a personal level.

Use of curriculum intended to eliminate sex biases.

- Have students develop a plan of their ideal career choice, based on the occupational requirements and their aptitudes. Have them include obstacles and difficulties they would have to overcome. Have them indicate in their plan how they would surpass the obstacles. Use this as an opportunity to support non-traditional vocational options.